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VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING

PUC Docket Number IP7013/TL-25-389

BEFORE THE COURT OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
FOR THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Application of Big
Bend Wind, LLC and Great River Energy for a Route
Permit for a 161-kV high voltage transmission line
and associated facilities in Martin County

Taken Via WebEx

January 14, 2026
6:00 P.M.

REPORTER: Jonna Schrupp, Stenographic Court Reporter

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WHEREUPON, the following proceedings were duly had and entered of record, to wit:

1 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Good evening,
2 everyone.

3 My name is Cezar Panait. I'm an engineer
4 with Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, and we
5 are meeting tonight in the matter of Big Bend Wind
6 Transmission Project. They submitted an
7 application.

8 This is the second of a series of two
9 public information and scoping meetings. We held
10 one in person last night in Windom and this is the
11 second and last meeting.

12 This is the PUC Docket Number 25-389.

13 Advancing the slide.

14 The meeting's agenda. So the purpose of
15 tonight's meeting is to gather input from members of
16 the public and any participant on this application
17 for a route permit that was submitted by Big Bend
18 Wind.

19 With this meeting there's an open public
20 comment period that has been open and remains open
21 through January 26, 2026.

22 Later on in March, in February or even
23 March, and based on public input such as we get
24 tonight and yesterday, the Commission will issue a
25 draft route permit and decide whether the

1 environmental assessment, commonly referred to as
2 the EA, whether the Applicant prepared that EA
3 adequately, and it describes any potential human and
4 environmental impacts of the project, or whether an
5 addendum to the EA will be needed. That is what the
6 Commission will decide in the February/March time
7 frame.

8 Public hearings will follow in the later
9 part of the winter or spring, along with a second
10 comment period associated with that public hearing.

11 Timing of public hearings will depend on
12 whether the Commission needs to prepare an addendum
13 to the EA and other factors, like project complexity
14 and any controversy.

15 The Commission may request an
16 administrative law judge, commonly referred to as
17 the ALJ, to oversee the hearing and prepare either a
18 full report or a summary of comments, or the
19 Commission may preside over the hearing, Commission
20 staffers that is.

21 The Commission then will consider the
22 entire records, making a decision on the route
23 permit application sometime in spring or summer
24 2026.

25 That permit decision will be made in an

1 open public meeting, where the public may attend
2 either in person or virtually online, and that
3 meeting will be properly noticed in eDockets.

4 I'll have a few more slides to go to but
5 I just want to introduce the participants in
6 tonight's meeting.

7 We'll be hearing from the Applicant about
8 a description of the project, and that is
9 representatives from Big Bend Wind. Then we'll hear
10 from Rich Davis, also with Minnesota Public
11 Utilities Commission about his role in this
12 application review. And then we'll open it up for
13 questions and comments from members of the public.

14 Just a few ground rules for the meeting.
15 I know we are meeting virtually and don't see a
16 large crowd attending, but please be respectful of
17 other's time, including the presenters and
18 commenters. We want to hear from everybody who
19 wants to make a comment tonight. Please take turns
20 commenting, one at a time.

21 We have a court reporter, I should have
22 started with that, that she will be transcribing all
23 the meeting tonight, everything that is said, and
24 that will become part of the Commission's record,
25 and that will be used by the commissioners to help

1 them decide on the docket later.

2 AS I already mentioned, the purpose for
3 tonight's meeting is to gather input and compile the
4 record for the Commission. Tonight there's an
5 opportunity for members of the public to ask us, the
6 state staff, about the review process or ask the
7 Applicant about a proposed project, any specifics,
8 meetings, timelines.

9 The second part of tonight's meeting is
10 to share any oral or written comments that members
11 of the public might have, including thoughts on the
12 project itself, additional information that will be
13 required, to see that needs to be provided and any
14 possible permit conditions that you might find
15 appropriate to mitigate any impacts of the project.

16 A few words about the Commission itself.
17 The Commission regulates electric, natural gas and
18 landline telephone utilities by setting rates and
19 certain standards for all investor owned utilities.

20 The Commission also issues site and route
21 permits for large energy facilities, which are
22 natural gas, wind farms, solar, battery storage,
23 something more recently that the Commission has been
24 issuing permits on, high voltage transmission lines
25 and certain pipelines.

1 The Commission itself consists of five
2 commissioners and these are appointed by the
3 governor for six year staggered terms, who decide on
4 permits, rates and other utility matters.

5 We have five commissioners, so we get a
6 new commissioner or a reappointed every five years
7 out of the six, because of the six year terms.

8 With that I would hand it over to Big
9 Bend Wind to talk about the project itself.

10 Brie.

11 MS. BRIE ANDERSON: Thank you, Cezar.

12 Thank you everybody online for joining,
13 we're excited to share information on the Big Bend
14 Wind extension project.

15 Can you go to the next slide, Cezar.

16 So my name is Brie Anderson. I work on
17 our permitting team responsible for submitting the
18 route permit application that we filed in December
19 and the reason we're here tonight.

20 With me here in the room that you can't
21 see but are also on our project team, Bipin on our
22 development team, Jenny on our environmental team.
23 This is a co-application with Great River Energy,
24 and I'll explain that as we go, but Mark from GRE is
25 also in the room, and Ryan Cox with our legal

1 counsel.

2 Next slide, please.

3 So Big Bend Wind is not a new project.
4 We've been working on Big Bend Wind -- personally I
5 have since 2019 and the larger APEX clean energy
6 team for longer than that.

7 We filed a site permit for the Big Bend
8 Wind project and a route permit for approximately 18
9 miles of transmission in 2020. The Commission
10 approved both of those two permits, the wind project
11 and 18 and a half miles of transmission, in
12 September of 2022.

13 Since that time we have negotiated a
14 power purchase agreement where Great River Energy is
15 going to buy the power generated by the wind
16 project. As part of that agreement we are going to
17 enter the transmission system at the Lakefield
18 generating station instead of the Crandall switching
19 station. So this change in our point of
20 interconnection requires an additional four and a
21 half miles of transmission and why we're here
22 tonight.

23 Along with that four and a half miles of
24 transmission we've got a new substation development
25 area where GRE will own a substation and Big Bend

1 will own a substation separated by a fence, I'll
2 show you what that looks like.

3 Next slide, please.

4 So this is the permitted Big Bend Wind
5 project, what the commission approved in 2022. The
6 blackout line is the wind project area. There are
7 51 blue dots in there, these are the turbines.

8 Extending to the south from the wind
9 project area is a yellow line, that is the
10 transmission line that was approved in 2022. The
11 red circled area on the south there, that is the
12 reason we're here tonight. That is the new four and
13 a half miles of transmission to get to that
14 Lakefield generating station.

15 Next slide, please.

16 If we zoom in on that it looks like this.
17 So, again, coming from, in the upper right corner of
18 the map, the yellow line is the permitted line, just
19 before we get to an existing 345 line that cuts
20 diagonally northeast to southwest. We will parallel
21 that line to the road and then generally follow
22 roads and parcels south and then west over to the
23 Lakefield generating station.

24 The yellow box on the map is the
25 substation development area where, again, Big Bend

1 Wind will have a substation, where the transmission
2 line will enter into, and then GRE will have a
3 substation on the same pad but across the fence to
4 put the power onto the grid.

5 Next slide.

6 So, again, this is approximately four and
7 a half miles of 161 kilovolt transmission line. We
8 are planning to use wood or steel monopole, so
9 single pole structures, that range from 70 to
10 approximately 120 feet tall.

11 Importantly, all of the landowners along
12 this route have signed private easements with Big
13 Bend Wind. So there are already signed agreements
14 for us to place the transmission line on their
15 property.

16 The route follows roads and parcel lines.
17 There are no residences within the route, and as I
18 mentioned, we'll have the substation development
19 area at the Lakefield Junction generating
20 substation.

21 Next slide.

22 Within our route permit we included an
23 environmental assessment, that is chapter five.
24 This looks at the potential impacts of the
25 transmission line and substations and proposed

1 mitigation measures to reduce those impacts. The
2 chapter of the environmental assessment covers a
3 number of topics in human settlement, aesthetics,
4 noise, things like land use, and then categories
5 like the natural environment, wildlife, wetlands,
6 water bodies, soil, things like that.

7 An example might be the route is
8 predominantly in agricultural land, and so we have
9 worked with landowners both on the type of poles we
10 plan to put in, in monopole structures, they're
11 easier to farm around, but also in the placement of
12 the transmission line and hopefully the structures
13 to minimize impacts on their agricultural
14 operations.

15 We can access those poles, generally
16 we're following roads, right from the road to reduce
17 soil compaction and things during construction by
18 driving down the right of way. So the environment
19 assessment looks at a number of factors, in
20 categories such as the human environment and the
21 natural environment.

22 Next slide.

23 In terms of timeline, we are here to work
24 through the route permit process with Public
25 Utilities Commission staff. We are hoping to get

1 through that process this summer and start
2 construction in the fall on the full wind project
3 and all 22 miles of transmission, the previously
4 permitted 18 miles and then this new four and a half
5 miles. We'll start construction on that all once,
6 to put the wind project into operation in the first
7 quarter of 2028.

8 Next slide.

9 And we're here to answer any questions
10 you might have, my contact information is on the
11 screen.

12 I'll pass it back over to Rich.

13 MR. RICH DAVIS: Thank you, Brie. Thank
14 you, Cezar.

15 My name is Rich Davis. I am an
16 environmental review manager with the Public
17 Utilities Commission, and I'm here to facilitate
18 kind of the permit considerations and the
19 environmental assessment, or the EA, portion of the
20 permit application from Big Bend and GRE in this
21 one.

22 So what does the Commission consider
23 before permit decision? They're looking at
24 potential human and environmental impacts, which
25 includes but isn't limited to noise, view sheds,

1 public safety, land use, public services, historic
2 and cultural resources, air and water quality,
3 plants and wildlife, use of existing rights of way.

4 Ways to reduce those impacts, how can the
5 project be designed and constructed or operated to
6 avoid, minimize or mitigate those impacts.

7 And compliance, our current route permit,
8 we have a sample of that available on eDockets that
9 has a number of standard permit conditions in it
10 that help to mitigate impacts. But we're also
11 looking for suggestions as to whether there could be
12 special permit conditions that would help to
13 minimize or mitigate impacts, different resources
14 when a project is being constructed or operated.

15 That kind of gets at how you can help at
16 the bottom of the slide there. Tell us about the
17 resources in or around the project area, how the
18 project may impact those resources and practical
19 ways to avoid, minimize or offset those impacts.

20 Next slide.

21 This is an anticipated review schedule
22 for review of the route permit application and the
23 environmental assessment, and working through the
24 process towards a final decision from the Commission
25 on permit issues.

1 The application was accepted by the
2 Commission on December 24th of 2025, which is what
3 starts the clock, so to speak, on our review
4 process.

5 Where the star is there, the public
6 information and EA scoping meetings, is what they're
7 referred to as, one, as Cezar mentioned, was last
8 night in person and now there's this one tonight
9 virtually.

10 The next step from this, the Commission
11 will issue a draft route permit and it decides on
12 the need for an environmental assessment addendum or
13 not. That will come in February of this year.

14 Public hearings and an associated comment
15 period with those hearings will come later this
16 winter or early spring.

17 And then the hearing summary or hearing
18 report from those public hearings and that comment
19 period will be issued in spring or summer of 2026,
20 and then that's followed pretty closely by the
21 Commission making a final decision on whether to
22 issue or not to issue the route permit for the
23 project.

24 Next slide.

25 So what is the draft permit that will

1 come out from these meetings and from comments and
2 everything. As I mentioned, right now there's a
3 sample permit that exists that comes out, it's got
4 standard permit conditions that we generally have in
5 every transmission project, and the route permits
6 that they've gotten issued to them. So that's kind
7 of the starting point of everything.

8 We use that to develop the draft permit
9 as the next step, which we use comments from members
10 of the public that are at these meetings or comments
11 that are submitted in writing or e-mail. We also
12 request comments from other state agencies and
13 federal agencies and tribal governments as well to
14 provide input. And we take those into consideration
15 to tailor the draft permit and include special
16 conditions if we feel any are necessary beyond what
17 is typically included in a sample permit.

18 A draft permit does not allow the
19 applicant to construct the project, just so
20 everybody knows that. That draft permit, once it's
21 ready to go it will be noticed in eDockets, and also
22 notice is required in the statute, and then we take
23 comments on that draft permit during the public
24 hearing, part of the permitting process.

25 Next slide.

1 So do we need an EA addendum or when are
2 they necessary? The Applicant had to create or
3 produce an environmental assessment, so an EA for
4 this project. And that, as mentioned by Brie, is
5 chapter 5 of the application that was submitted, and
6 that includes information on potential human and
7 environmental impacts for the proposed project, and
8 also discusses ways to mitigate those potential
9 impacts.

10 So there's some questions on the slide
11 here that kind of help us -- I should say they help
12 commenters to focus their comments for us that can
13 really help us narrow in or focus in on potential
14 concerns or issues that might be out there for the
15 project and that we might need to consider adding
16 additional special conditions to the permit for.

17 So are there potential human and
18 environmental impacts or unique characteristics that
19 are missing from the application? Are there
20 mitigation measures that require further evaluation?
21 And are there alternative routes or route segments
22 that should be considered.

23 It's really important to us to get input
24 from folks that are in the project area, because you
25 know of local resources and local features that are

1 important to the local communities that are out
2 there, and we don't always know about those and we
3 can't always see them on maps. So those are the
4 kind of comments that are greatly appreciated that
5 point us in the direction of finding out about those
6 types of unique characteristics that are out there
7 in the project area.

8 Next slide, please.

9 Topics for comment, are there potential
10 human and environmental impacts of the proposed
11 project that are not adequately addressed in the EA
12 portion of the application? Again, chapter 5.

13 Examples could include aesthetics, construction
14 noise, agriculture, road use, wildlife or safety.

15 Next slide.

16 Additionally, for comments if you could
17 direct them at practical methods to minimize,
18 mitigate or avoid potential impacts of the proposed
19 project that we should consider, or that the
20 commissioners should consider as well, as possible
21 special conditions for the draft route permit. So
22 might be things that have to do with the alignment
23 of the project, alternative routes or route
24 segments.

25 These are just examples, if there's

1 snowmobile trails out in the area, construction
2 techniques, bird flight diverters, natural resource
3 surveys that may be appropriate for the project.

4 It's important to remember, I like to
5 point out, that if alternative routes or route
6 segments are submitted by folks, there is a step in
7 there that we evaluate those alternatives to see how
8 they could potentially reduce or avoid resource
9 impacts, and also looking at feasibility or
10 constructability of those projects. And then if one
11 of those alternatives or route segments was deemed
12 appropriate to carry forward as an alternative,
13 that's when we would issue a scope for an EA
14 addendum to come out.

15 Next slide.

16 So topics for comment, these are directly
17 off of the public notice that went out for these
18 meetings. But these are questions for commenters to
19 think about and help us focus in on potential items
20 that we may need to consider whether or not we need
21 an EA addendum or special conditions to the draft
22 route permit.

23 So it's, are there potential human and
24 environmental impacts, unique characteristics or
25 mitigation measures for the proposed project needing

1 further development in an EA addendum?

2 Are there any additional alternative
3 routes or route segments that should be evaluated in
4 an EA addendum?

5 Are there practical methods to minimize,
6 mitigate or avoid potential impacts of the proposed
7 project that the Commission should consider and
8 include as conditions of a draft route permit?

9 Next slide.

10 This has all the info on how to provide
11 comments. So last night we had it open for verbal
12 comments as well, as well as tonight's meeting.

13 After we're done with the presentations
14 here you'll have an opportunity to provide verbal
15 comments if you would like. You can also complete
16 and submit comments online at that address that's on
17 there, and just follow the steps on the website. Or
18 you can write up your comments and e-mail them to
19 myself, that's my e-mail address on there, or you
20 can mail to me, whatever your preferred method is.

21 I'd just like to point out to folks that
22 if you submit comments in any version on there, you
23 don't have to submit them in a second format or in a
24 different way. We treat all comments the same,
25 whether it's a verbal comment or whether it comes in

1 by mail or e-mail. They're all treated and handled
2 the same way by myself and our staff.

3 It's important to note the comment period
4 ends on January 26th of 2026 at 4:30 p.m.

5 Next slide.

6 Kind of the next steps after this. Based
7 on information in the record, including comments
8 that come in during the comment period, comments
9 tonight, the Commission will make two preliminary
10 determinations and that's, Is an environmental
11 assessment addendum necessary before a hearing is
12 held? And what conditions should the Commission
13 include in the draft route permit, which we will
14 make available to the public for review and comment
15 at public hearings.

16 Next slide.

17 Commenting etiquette, it's a little bit
18 different since we have a little more control on
19 when folks are commenting. Obviously we're just
20 going to have one speaker at a time, but when you do
21 come on please state and spell your name, because we
22 do have a court reporter on here and she's keeping
23 track of everything that's discussed here for us
24 tonight, and we want to make sure that we can make
25 sure she is able to attribute your comments to you

1 as you make them.

2 We have control on the length of time,
3 but we try to give folks a few minutes to make a
4 comment. Tonight I don't think that's going to be
5 too big of an issue, to make sure everybody has a
6 chance to speak. And maintain respect for one
7 another.

8 Next slide, please.

9 With that I think we're going to -- this
10 is important, but that's a close out slide, so I
11 think we're going to open it up here to folks if
12 anybody would like to comment.

13 Cezar, do they have a way to raise their
14 hand, yes, they should be able to, right?

15 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes.

16 MR. RICH DAVIS: At the bottom of your
17 screen there there's a raise your hand button if
18 you'd like to speak. We'd prefer to not have too
19 much of it in the chat, but if you're having trouble
20 raising your hand or anything else you can throw a
21 chat in the chat box as well and we can get you set
22 up to make a comment.

23 I am not seeing anything on here, Cezar.

24 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Me neither.

25 MR. RICH DAVIS: I'll send it around one

1 more time. If you'd like to make a comment raise
2 your hand, throw it in the comment or chat in the
3 chat box there, something to get our attention so
4 that we can take you off mute and give you an
5 opportunity to speak.

6 Seeing nothing in here right now. Last
7 scan. I don't see anything on here.

8 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: I don't see the chat
9 box, there's nothing in there either, right?

10 MR. RICH DAVIS: I can't see anything in
11 the chat, nothing new anyway.

12 I guess we'll finish it out here.

13 Just some important reminders on this
14 last slide. All comments that come in will be made
15 available for the public to look at via eDockets.
16 We also will take the meeting minutes and notes will
17 go up as soon as those are finalized and complete.

18 Just a reminder that the Commission does
19 not edit or delete personal identifying information
20 from the submissions. So if you're e-mailing or
21 sending in a comment, anything that you send is what
22 gets posted. We don't want to give the impression
23 or the idea that we're deleting portions of
24 anybody's comments, so that's our standard practice.

25 The written comment period closes on

1 January 26th of 2026. So if you have any questions
2 on how to make comments or if you have questions
3 about alternatives or anything like that, feel free
4 to e-mail myself and I can help answer your
5 questions or assist you getting comments in if you
6 have any.

7 With that, I just want to tell everybody
8 thank you for attending and thanks to the panelists.

9 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Thank you. Have a
10 good night.

11 (Proceedings concluded at 6:31 p.m.)

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1 STATE OF MINNESOTA)

2 COUNTY OF HENNEPIN)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

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I, Jonna Schrupp, do hereby certify

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that the above and foregoing transcript,

8

consisting of the preceding 23 pages is a

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correct transcript of my stenographic notes of

10

the proceedings to the best of my ability.

11

Dated January 23, 2026

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/s/ Jonna Schrupp

JONNA SCHRUPP

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Stenographic Court Reporter

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